

The Treasury Department reported this week that the federal debt has surpassed \$16 trillion. Spread that figure out across all American citizens, and it comes to \$51,000 per person. My family would owe \$357,000. We couldn't cover it.

Most Nebraskans find the national debt load unfathomable. Our cities, towns and villages have to balance their books. They can't order more police officers, firefighters, or street repair than they can afford. Before going to Congress, I served on the Lincoln City Council. We had to find a way to balance reasonable fees and taxes with reasonable services. If we couldn't pay or plan for a project within its operating budget, it wasn't going to happen. Similarly, our unicameral Legislature has to work with the Governor each year to balance the state's budget. It's not easy. There are increasing demands for spending on education, roads, and human services, but our lawmakers are bound by law to create and oversee a balanced state budget.

Unfortunately, that is not the case in Washington. There is no balanced budget requirement, though I have repeatedly advocated and supported congressional attempts to enact one. For too long, spending was charged on the credit card and borrowed against future generations. The magnitude of today's debt is such that the U.S. spent more last year on the interest paid on publicly held debt than it spent on many federal departments, including the Departments of Agriculture and Veterans Affairs.

Though they might be hidden from you, the consequences of such debt are real. Debt is effectively a tax on our children, it shifts assets to foreign investors such as China, and it is potentially inflationary with the harshest impacts falling on the poor. Uncertainty surrounding the high level of government debt is also hurting the economy and stunting the creation of new jobs.

In community meetings over recent weeks, Nebraskans in communities from Norfolk to Nebraska City asked me what can be done to clean up this fiscal mess and set our federal government on a fiscally sustainable path. I think most Nebraskans just want to see something meaningful done. A good start would be cultural change in Washington. When confronted with a complex challenge, Nebraskans instinctively will work together to solve it. Our ag-based work ethic, pragmatism, and "git-r-done" mindset don't leave room for the kinds of gamesmanship that too often stifle productivity and creative exchange in Washington.

With the engagement of good citizens like the ones I met with in recent weeks, I believe

Washington can change. Substantive budgetary reform will require bold resolve and a willingness to break out of timeworn, uncreative political lanes. Working smartly and respectfully, I am hopeful we can start down the pathway of constructive solutions that include a substantial reduction in overspending, the right type of tax reform, and a commitment to unleashing the potential of small businesses and entrepreneurs. Then, America wins.